



Update from U.S. Senator John Cornyn

February 2005

During the month of February, Congress will take up various issues that will be among the top priorities over the next year. The President's policy goals, outlined in his February 2 State of the Union address, underscore the responsibility this generation has to leave a better world for our children and grandchildren. And in keeping with these policy goals, Congress will address the burgeoning challenge of strengthening Social Security; nominations to the administration and the judiciary; and lawsuit abuse and class action reform. We will also take up the budget blueprint presented to us by the President. In all of these areas, I will appreciate hearing from you as we head down the long road of debate in the months ahead.

War on Terror: Democracy's First Steps in Iraq

Iraqi elections, held on January 30, delivered a strong blow to terrorists and were a major first step toward an Iraqi future of security and self-rule. Less than two years ago the only voice that mattered in Iraq was that of Saddam Hussein. Now, Iraqis across that nation have the freedom to make their voices heard.

Despite the predictions of countless critics, high citizen participation in these elections demonstrates Iraq's solid progress on the hard road to freedom. And elections are just the beginning. We will see the true impact of Iraqi freedom over the next generation, as responsible leaders emerge and the remains of tyranny are wiped away. I have the utmost confidence in our troops who are serving in Iraq. The victories won and newfound freedoms gained will help the world know that the lives risked and lost during the liberation were not in vain.

Partisanship and the Nomination Process

The President has nominated well-qualified individuals for cabinet positions in his second term, including two particularly prominent and respected nominees: Dr. Condoleezza Rice and Judge Alberto Gonzales. Dr. Rice is a woman of outstanding accomplishment and intelligence, and Judge Gonzales—the pride of the Hispanic community—is an honorable man, a good Texan and an exceptional attorney. Both were recently confirmed by the Senate.

Unfortunately, we saw the specter of partisanship rise up against these nominees during their confirmation process. It is a shame that, though the voice of the people was so strongly heard during November elections, and though the 109th Congress has just begun, already a minority of Senate partisans has brought the leftover angst of the campaign season to bear against bright and honorable nominees. I hope my colleagues will not take this partisan course for the rest of the term. Despite the rhetoric, I am confident that Dr. Rice, Judge Gonzales, and the remaining nominees will serve the country with distinction.

Economy: Continued Growth and Opportunity

According to the recent report from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, America's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased at an inflation-adjusted annual rate of 3.1% in the fourth quarter of 2004. Consumer spending grew at a healthy 4.6% annual rate in the fourth quarter, and real GDP increased 4.4% in 2004 (compared with an increase of 3% in 2003). The result: Growth in 2004 was the highest since 1999.

For all of the campaign season naysaying, our economy is amazingly healthy given the difficulties our country has faced since 9/11. Now we must seize the opportunity to bolster our economic future and global competitiveness—including making tax cuts permanent, cutting government spending and unnecessary regulations, lowering the cost of health care by reforming our liability system, and promoting partnerships with private industry that will ensure our strength in the global market for decades to come.

Making the Tax System More Simple and Fair

I was proud to cosponsor the American Jobs Creation Act of 2004, legislation which allows citizens to choose between deducting state

and local income tax or state and local sales tax on 2004 and 2005 federal income taxes. This is an obvious choice for Texans, since our state has no income tax; I urge you to take full advantage of it.

To take advantage of this, you must itemize your federal deductions. You may (but aren't required to) use IRS tax tables to calculate and deduct your 2004 state and local sales tax. Alternately, you can also pull out your receipts from 2004 and add up the tax you paid. The tables offer an alternative to receipt-saving by using your income level and number of exemptions to calculate the correct amount. In addition to the table-generated or receipt-calculated number, you can also add the general sales tax paid on big-ticket items like cars, trucks, vans, homes, or home-building materials.

While the Texas sales tax is 6.25%, local entities can add up to 2% to that number, so be sure you account for the entire amount of tax paid. Tables can be downloaded from the [IRS Web site, Publication 600, Optional State Sales Tax Tables \(PDF\)](#), in Adobe Acrobat PDF format.

For more information click here:

<http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=132383,00.html>

<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p600.pdf>

Immigration: New Chairmanship Role

In the 109th Congress, I will serve as chairman of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship. I believe that chairing this important panel will provide an excellent opportunity to help bolster our nation's efforts to enforce our immigration laws, strengthen security along our nation's borders, and reform the nation's broken immigration system.

At this time, Congress is seriously considering a number of different reforms to our immigration system—a challenge I welcome and find long overdue. The new realities of our post-9/11 world make border security one of our most urgent responsibilities. Moreover, we must also work to combat human smuggling and other exploitation, while acknowledging the important contributions that immigrants make to our economy. I intend to reexamine the Border Security and Immigration Reform Act in the coming months, and I would appreciate hearing from you regarding this important issue.

Come See Me

If you're traveling to Washington for business or pleasure, I would greatly appreciate the chance to say hello while you're here. I host an open house in my office, Hart Senate Office Building, Room 625, from 9:00 to 9:30 a.m. every Tuesday when Congress is in session, so I can greet and talk with Texans. Please call my assistant, Denise Pleasant, at (202) 224-2934 to let me know you'll be coming.

Best regards,

Senator John Cornyn